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TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- 11. Mideast
- 12. Syrian-Lebanese Track
- 13. Iraq
- 14. Iran: Nuclear Program

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio quoted security sources as saying that Israel will hand over Qalqilya to PA security responsibility next week if the Palestinians abide by their pledge to collect weapons from wanted Palestinian activists. The media reported that mortar shells and Qassam rockets were launched at Israeli targets Tuesday -- attacks which Israel Radio says were condemned by PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas. Israel Radio reported on a heightened state of alert in Jerusalem this morning. The station reported that this morning two Palestinian youths carrying explosives were captured at a roadblock near Jenin.

Both Maariv and Ha'aretz bannered the mass rally expected to take place in the Gaza Strip's Katif Bloc today. Ha'aretz reported that police expect up to 80,000 people to take part in the demonstration. Yediot reported that the Ashkelon Municipality has offered to resettle Katif Bloc evacuees in villas to be built on a private beach. The newspaper cited the municipality as saying that the Prime Minister's Office has approved the plan. Ha'aretz quoted GOI sources as saying that they are not negotiating a deal with settlers from Gadim and Kadim from the northern West Bank over an early evacuation date.

Yediot reported that PA Negotiations Minister Saeb Erekat attended the funeral service for former president Ezer Weizman Tuesday.

Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday Abbas promoted Rashid Abu Shabak to the PA's overall security chief. Jerusalem Post describes him as a "Palestinian commander responsible for a ruthless campaign against suspected 'collaborators' in the Gaza Strip."

All media highlighted the arrival of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Israel today for a "historic" visit that will include talks on Iran's nuclear program, Russia's sale of anti-aircraft missiles to Syria, the issue of rising anti-Semitism in Russia, and the question of fugitive Russian Jewish oligarchs in Israel. A Yediot headline reads: "The Czar's Visit." Over the past few days, the media noted the fact that Putin's visit originally coincided with the expected guilty verdict of Russian Jewish oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky. (It was postponed today by three weeks.)

Israel Radio reported that the U.S. Defense Department has informed the U.S. Congress that Israel has requested to purchase 100 laser-guided bombs that can penetrate fortified underground targets, for a sum of USD 30 million. The radio cited the Pentagon as saying that the sale of the bombs, which are manufactured by Lockheed Martin and can be carried by F15 fighter planes, will not affect the balance of power in the region. The station reported that American experts told Reuters that Israel could use the bombs against Iran's nuclear installations.

Ha'aretz reported that the Construction and Housing Ministry continues to make plans for the E-1 corridor linking Ma'aleh Adumim to Jerusalem, despite a declaration by Construction and Housing Minister Yitzhak Herzog that this construction is not in the plan for 2005.

All media reported that the IDF soldier who was run over by a taxi near Hebron Monday night was probably killed by friendly fire.

Ha'aretz says that there has been talk in the defense establishment about ending IAF overflights in Lebanese air space after the Syrian troops depart, but that the decision so far is to continue the overflights on the grounds that they are vital for operational reasons.

In Yediot, Prof. Eytan Gilboa writes that the newly released CIA report that denies the existence of WMD in pre-war Iraq is dramatic, but that it will not change anything.

In a report from Dubai, Jerusalem Post featured Abdulaziz Sager, the initiator of the think tank Gulf Research Center (GRC), who urges dialogue with Israelis, but has also castigated U.S. pro-Israel activists as "hate-mongering forces."

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "It was the Americans who told the Israelis in talks in Texas the simple truth: Abu Mazen is the only horse on the ground."

Block Quotes:

"It All Starts Now"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (April 27): "In Abu Mazen's case, the first 100 days are less important than the second 100 days, which are starting now. This second 100 days will include disengagement and will determine Abu Mazen's fate, the fate of the peace process, the fate of disengagement and the chances for a certain amount of stability in the region in its wake. The way Abu Mazen's administration weathers disengagement, if he succeeds in weathering it calmly, if he succeeds in preventing violence, if he takes over land and property in an orderly manner and ensures quiet in Gaza in its wake -- all these will determine the future of the Palestinian leader and perhaps also the political future of Ariel Sharon, as well as ours.... Abu Mazen's real allies are in Washington. On the eve of Sharon's last visit to the U.S., Sharon's aides described Abu Mazen as irretrievably dead. On the way back they already spoke differently. It was the Americans who told the Israelis in talks in Texas the simple truth: Abu Mazen is the only horse on the ground, and he must be given all the time in the world and all the patience that can be mobilized, because there is nothing behind him. Sharon, as of now, is toeing the line. He will soon meet with Abu Mazen, and hear from him face to face how he plans to weather disengagement in peace. And afterwards, we will cross our fingers."

12. Syrian-Lebanese Track:

Summary:

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The international coalition that joined the U.S. in its unequivocal demand for a Syrian pullout could now stare straight into President Bush's eyes and tell him that he should ask of Israel what he had requested from Assad."

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, ostensibly completed yesterday ... is far from being satisfactory to the U.S."

Block Quotes:

1I. "A New Hope in Lebanon"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist *Yediot Aharonot* (April 27): "Five years after the last IDF soldier left the soil of Lebanon, Syria is completing its withdrawal from there after dozens of years of occupation and exploitation. These are amazing sights, which would have been inconceivable one or two years ago.... First of all, one may hope that war-torn Lebanon, which during the past three decades has mostly known occupying forces that fought their wars on its soil, will be able to find the golden path despite ethnic and religious strife in its society.... What is really important is not the fact that the U.S. is just beyond [Syria's] border, and has already shown its resolve to forcefully intervene in countries whose regimes don't please it. No less important is the enlistment of the entire international community, including countries on whose empathy Syria had counted, in the elimination of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon.... Israel can be happy about Assad's [eventual] downfall.... But it is not certain that those who are convinced that the U.S. administration -- a half-ton gorilla that set the rules of the game as it wishes -- will want (or be able) to ignore an occupation in a less easy spot for the U.S. than Lebanon. The international coalition that joined the U.S. in its unequivocal demand for a Syrian pullout could now stare straight into President Bush's eyes and tell him that he should ask of Israel what he had requested from Assad."

II. "Troops Out, But U.S. Doesn't Trust Assad"

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in independent, left-leaning *Ha'aretz* (April 27): "The Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, ostensibly completed yesterday and marked by a ceremony in the Bekaa, is far from being satisfactory to the U.S. As far as Washington is concerned, Syrian President Bashar Assad remains a problematic and dangerous leader in the region, even if he obeyed the explicit American demand to withdraw his troops from Lebanon by the deadline. The U.S. list of complaints against Syria is long and detailed, beginning with the issue of the Iraqi-Syrian border.... The terror issue makes up a major component on the American list of complaints.... Beyond those complaints, Washington simply does not trust Assad.... As far as the [U.S.] administration is concerned, Assad at best is unreliable, and at worst is an incorrigible conniver who should not be engaged until he has met all the U.S. demands. And the U.S. says Assad is far from doing so. The withdrawal from Lebanon only erases one article from the list of complaints. Only when Assad erases each and every one of the complaints will it be possible to accept him as a legitimate partner for dialogue."

3. Iraq:

Summary:

Ben-Gurion University political scientist Niv Gordon wrote in independent, left-leaning *Ha'aretz*: "The current [U.S.] administration has adopted [in Iraq] the model of 'democratic occupation' ... which Israel has developed in the West Bank and Gaza."

Block Quotes:

"The Occupier's Subcontractor"

Ben-Gurion University political scientist Niv Gordon wrote in independent, left-leaning *Ha'aretz* (April 27): "Israel is the key to understanding President Bush's strategy in Iraq. This isn't because it influenced in any way the decision-making process that led to the second Gulf war, but because the current [U.S.] administration has adopted the model of 'democratic occupation' -- as [former communist Knesset member] Tamar Gozansky has dubbed it -- which Israel has developed in the West Bank and Gaza.... Following protracted negotiations, the Palestinian Authority was established -- as an entity that took upon itself the daily organization of the occupied territories' residents, whereas Israel retained control of 80 percent of the land reserves. Within a few months, the civil institutions ... were transferred from Israel to the hands of the young authority, which received a limited type of sovereignty. Thus, without renouncing its right to rule in the West Bank and Gaza, Israel handed over responsibility over the residents to a kind of subcontractor -- the PA -- abruptly reduced the cost of the occupation.... The Bush administration found

that strategy particularly suitable to the narrative of the 'dissemination of freedom' in the Middle East."

4. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Former senior Mossad official Uri Ne'eman wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Israel must not arouse a new enemy against itself and create a direct conflict with the Iranian state and people, with which it may be possible to maintain normal relations, given a different regime in Tehran."

Block Quotes:

"Don't Bomb Iran"

Former senior Mossad official Uri Ne'eman wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (April 27): "Iran will have nuclear weapons, and Israel must prepare to reduce the threat this embodies to a tolerable or even negligible minimum. However, Israel must also avoid a direct bloody conflict with Iran, and must remove from its agenda all thoughts of an offensive violent Israeli action against Iran and its nuclear installations, with the aim of obstructing its nuclearization process.... Iran is a regional power, with everything this implies. The present Iranian regime wishes for the elimination of the State of Israel, and harasses it through its emissaries. However, there is no direct conflict between Iran and Israel.... Israel must not arouse a new enemy against itself and create a direct conflict with the Iranian state and people, with which it may be possible to maintain normal relations, given a different regime in Tehran.... Only the U.S. ... can land massive and ongoing overwhelming blows on Iran and maintain them operationally over time. The U.S. is also capable of preparing properly against possible Iranian reactions, including terror attacks around the world against its interests and installations, and also withstand the burden of international criticism and outcries that will arise. Israel is as far from these capabilities as a small country is far from a superpower. It will never have such capabilities. There is no point in entertaining the illusion that Israel can prevent, on its own and with its own strength, Iran's nuclearization, not only today and tomorrow but from here on, not to say until the end of time."

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